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About the monthly Water Level bulletin
March Precipitation Over the Great Lakes
As a percentage of the long-term March average:
Great Lakes Basin 67%
Lake Erie (including Lake St. Clair) 79%
Lake Superior 75%
Lakes Michigan-Huron 59%
Lake Ontario 67%
Note: These figures are preliminary.
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LEVEL news

Great Lakes - St. Lawrence River Water Levels

Volume 4, Number 4 **April 4, 1996**

Dry Weather Over Most of the Basin

Seasonal Rise in Lake Levels Stalled

After a wetter than average start to the year in the upper portion of the Great Lakes basin, dry conditions throughout the basin during March put the brakes on the seasonal rise in lake levels and flows. Only Lake Erie experienced a significant increase in levels during the month, with all the other lakes and the Port of Montreal either holding steady or declining slightly.

The water level at the Port of Montreal has been declining gradually since late February, and is expected to rise again during the Ottawa River freshet, sometime in April or early May.

Water levels on Lakes Ontario, Erie and St. Clair are expected to begin rising gradually until June or July. Lake Ontario is currently near the seasonal average whereas Erie and St. Clair are 10-20 cm above average.

Both Lake Superior and Lake Michigan-Huron levels are slightly above the seasonal average and are expected to rise until August or September.

After an early freeze-up last winter in the St. Lawrence River between Lake Ontario and Montreal, ice was just about gone by the third week of March. However, ice cover persisted over much of the Great Lakes, with the exception of Lake Ontario, at the end of March.

The 1996 Seaway navigation season began on March 29 in both the St. Lawrence River and the Welland Canal.

Changes Proposed for Ice Boom

The central topic of discussion at the International Niagara Board of Control's meeting with the public in Buffalo on March 19 was a proposal by Ontario Hydro and New York Power Authority to use steel pontoons in the Lake Erie-Niagara River ice boom. The power entities have requested permission from the International Joint Commission to conduct a field demonstration in 1996-97 by replacing five of the twenty-two timber spans with steel pontoons, as a cost saving measure. If this is successful and receives IJC approval, the remaining timber spans would be replaced over the following three years. No concerns or objections to the proposal were raised at the meeting.

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Summary information for "LEVEL*news*"

Boards of Control Public Meetings

The International St. Lawrence River Board of Control will hold its annual meeting with the public in Watertown, New York on either June 4 or 5. The Lake Superior Board of Control is also planning to hold its public meeting sometime in mid-June or early July, in the Whitefish Bay area of Michigan. These dates are tentative, and we will update you in our next issue.

Getting The Most From Your Water Level Bulletin

The Water Level Bulletin that you receive every month along with this newsletter contains historic as well as forecast information about the levels of the Great Lakes and Montréal Harbour.

1. The six graphs show the six-month water level forecast together with levels actually recorded since January, 1995.

   The recorded levels are indicated by the curving black line that extends part way across the grid. The two dotted lines that diverge from the end of this line indicate the six-month forecast. They allow for very high water supplies (the top line) and very low water supplies (the bottom line). Depending upon supplies that actually occur, the water level is forecast to fall between these two lines, although extremely high or low supplies could cause levels above or below these lines.

2. You can compare recently recorded levels and the forecast with the long-term averages for each of the lakes or Montréal Harbour. The long-term averages are indicated by the undulating gray lines that extend the entire width of each graph.

   These averages are taken over the period 1918 - 1995 for the lakes, and 1967-1995 for Montréal Harbour.

3. Each graph also indicates the highest and lowest water levels recorded during the period of record. These are represented by bars corresponding to each month of the year, and are accompanied by the year in which the particular level was recorded.

4. For example, the maximum water level for Lake Erie in May was recorded in 1986. The record low occurred in 1934.

   The figures along the right hand side of the graph tell you that the record high water level elevation was slightly less than 175 metres (IGLD 1985).

   IGLD is short for International Great Lakes Datum, which is the reference system used for measuring Great Lakes-St. Lawrence levels. Elevations are measured in metres above a zero point in the St. Lawrence River that corresponds roughly to sea level. 175 metres on the graph can be interpreted as 175 metres above sea level. Each block on the graph represents 10 centimetres (20 cm at Montréal).

5. Using the figures on the left hand side of the graph, you will find that the May record high for Lake Erie was about 1.5 metres above Chart Datum. The May record low was about 8 cm below Chart Datum.

   Chart Datum is a reference level used for depths shown on navigation charts. For example, Chart Datum for Lake Erie is 173.5 metres above sea level.

6. The back page of the Bulletin summarizes some of these statistics.

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URL: http://www.on.ec.gc.ca/water/level-news/lvn96apr.html